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THE NAMELESS CRIME:

A DISCOURSE,

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DELIVERED IN THE

FIRST CONSTITUTIONAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

Sunday Night, April 23, 1865,

BY REV. H. DUNNING, PASTOR.

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ADDRESS.

Brethren and Friends :

Having to speak to you to-night of a crime that has no name, it would seem appropriate that my discourse should have no text. *Let the horrid crime itself be my text.*

On the last Sabbath morning, it being my first opportunity after the commission of that unparalleled crime which deprived the nation of its beloved and honored head, I took occasion to speak to you, in general terms, of the *horrible fact itself*, which had struck the nation dumb by its atrocity. I then gave utterance, promptly and decidedly, to the feelings which were excited in my own heart by the shocking event.

On Wednesday last, at the hour of the funeral solemnities in Washington, while we here, in common with the whole nation, were bowed in sympathy and sorrow, I took occasion as was most befitting at such a time, to speak of some of the more remarkable *characteristics* of that great man upon whose shoulders God had twice devolved responsibilities, greater and weightier than almost ever fell upon man; and who had thus been, by the brutal hand of violence, snatched away, ere, as it would seem, he had finished the work God had given him to do.

I am now to speak of that *nameless crime* by which the land has been deprived of the honored represent-

ative of its life and authority ; the people of their beloved and trusted President ; and Freedom and Humanity of their most faithful friend. I deem it my duty at such a time to speak, and to speak in all fidelity, irrespective of the favor and the frown of men ; and I should speak what I believe the appalling occasion bids me speak, though an hundred devils stood before me, frowning and forbidding.

The *nameless crime* is my theme ; and why do I call it a nameless crime? Because there is not in our language a word which expresses this horrid deed. For killing in almost every form or relation, there is a name specific and descriptive : for this there is none. It is not homicide ; that term does not by any means express the whole of this crime. It is not murder ; killing a man "with malice aforethought" does not fill out the measure of this iniquity. It is not merely assassination, for here was more meant and done than the mere stealthy killing of a man. It is not regicide, for our President was no king. It is not tyrannicide, for our twice chosen head of thirty millions of people, of the people, in sympathy with the people, beloved of the people, was no tyrant. How then shall we express the assassination of the elected head of a free nation? There is no word that contains and describes the deed. It is only by circumlocution of horrid phrase that you can express it. Let it remain a nameless deed forever ; a horrid blank in human language. Of this nameless crime, who can describe its *atrocity and wickedness?* Look at the spirit which generated and accomplished the deed. It is the spirit of rebellion, of rebellion against divinely constituted authority and law. The Bible teaches us that government

is of God: "*The powers that be are ordained of God.*" Human government therefore finds its basis, support, strength and authority in God. Resistance to a divinely constituted government is therefore resistance to God. "*Whosoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.*" Now the spirit of this crime is the spirit of rebellion intensified to the highest possible degree. It strikes not only at the representative of government, but at the authority of government; and through the representative, at those he represents; and through them, at all government itself; and through government, at God, the author of government. The spirit of this crime first developed itself in heaven. There it struck at God, and could it have realized its malignant purpose, it would have dethroned and have annihilated God.

The spirit of this crime is the animating spirit of all sin. Its aim is the destruction of all government, human and divine. It would annihilate God, and devastate the universe. And this reveals to us the appalling enormity of this nameless crime.

And when we consider the *relations existing between the victim* of this crime and the *criminal himself*, its atrocity reveals itself in still darker colors. This blow, be it remembered, was not aimed at Abraham Lincoln, the man, the citizen, the individual, but at Abraham Lincoln the *President*. The assassin had no hatred of the *man*, perhaps no living being had; but of the President, and *because* he *was* President. But the President, as such, is only the representative of national life and authority. He is the nation embodied. The blow then was aimed at the nation, the life and heart of the nation, and could it have realized its horrid malignity in desired result, it would

have annihilated not only the government, but the nation whose embodied life the government is.

Now, the intense malignity and enormity of the crime reveals itself in the fact that its perpetrator was living at the time only on the forbearance and leniency of the President. He openly professed to be, he was publicly known to be an enemy of the government whose protection he enjoyed, whose protection he was base enough to continue to enjoy and to abuse for its attempted destruction! Yet, though thus known as a declared enemy, he was spared and protected from judgment by the misplaced forbearance of that government against which he lifted his assassin hand, and at which he aimed this deadly blow! His freedom and life as a declared enemy of government, in this hour of its great struggle for continued existence and authority, had both been forfeited. He was permitted the enjoyment of both by the too great leniency of the President. That leniency he outraged by the murder of him that showed it! If anything can show the hideous enormity of this crime, and its desert of a double damnation, this fact reveals it.

But its criminality is still further enhanced, by the fact, that, its noble victim was, at the time meditating an amnesty to all the thousands who had been engaged in long and bitter strife against the government of which he was the twice chosen representative and executive, and who were, just in this hour of victory, wholly in his power. At such a time, when clemency, when forgiveness, when an earnest desire to assuage the bitterness engendered by this unhallowed and conquered rebellion ruled in the heart of this good man; at such a time, in contradiction to

every impulse of gratitude or generosity, this fearful deed was done! It was in wicked harmony indeed with the base ingratitude of them who had been nursed at the bosom of the republic, but who had striven to drive the assassin's dagger to her maternal heart.

And then too *what blindness, what stupidity* what *desperate infatuation* in this crime! What could it accomplish *now* for the cause it was designed to aid? Had it been committed four years ago, it might have been extenuated by the wicked plea of the aid it would render to the then newly inaugurated rebellion; but now it can have no such diabolic justification; on the contrary, it is manifest that nothing could operate so seriously to the detriment of their cause who had already, whether willingly or unwillingly, submitted to the government. Nothing could have been done which will so certainly cement, weld, intensify, and augment the loyality of the nation. A hundred victories could not have produced such a result. The blindness, the infatuation of the deed are astounding. How does iniquity overleap itself, and perish in its folly!

The question now here arises, and it is one which will be long pondered by the world, and which must have an answer, *how* COULD *this deed have been done? How* COULD this crime have *been committed?*

We are now too near the commission of the horrid crime itself to answer this question fully. But in part you may see the explanation of the possibility and the fact of its commission in the *well known life and character of the assassin.* His long practice in theatric displays and mock crimes and tragedies had made him insensible to the guilt of real crimes. It

had doubtless given birth to the feeling that it would furnish a sort of grand theatric display before the world; that it would be a grand tragedy, enacted upon a grand scale in real life, the victim of which, should fall from the most exalted seat of power, the auditory of which should be the world, and the chief actor therein, as the assassin himself described it, should win for himself immortal fame.

Smitten, perhaps, with an accursed ambition for such fame, long cherishing the spirit which has inflamed the heart and nerved the arm of this rebellion from the beginning; harboring the most deadly hostility towards the government, whose representative the President was; long brooding over the dark iniquity, and plotting it with his co-conspirators; urged on by those who were engaged in the same diabolic effort against the nation's life on a grander and more open and acknowledged scale; thus excited, stimulated, urged on, restrained by no moral or religious influences; dissuaded, withheld alas! by no kind friend; finding only unhallowed stimulation in the drinking saloon and in the brothel; fired by the demon spirit of that institution which the rebel Hunter declared was the cause of the whole rebellion, whose friend and defender he was; thus animated and urged; and thus unhappily unrestrained; this young man at length, after many purposed attempts, found strength of diabolic purpose with which to strike the fatal blow. To a certain extent this would seem to account for the crime. In our horror of the deed, we may exclaim, of the suspected criminal, in words with which he must have been familiar, and which, perhaps with tragic strut across the stage, he had often quoted:

"Beyond the infinite and boundless reach
Of mercy, if thou *didst* this, this deed of death,
Art thou damned."

And what a lesson have we here to the young and to all upon the influence of theatric displays and of the theatric spirit. The performing and the witnessing of fictitious crimes, prepares the heart for the commission of real crimes.

And what a startling exhibition have we here of *the depravity of the human heart.* This crime proves to us that there is no conceivable enormity of wickedness; no height or depth of possible iniquity which does not lie concealed in the human heart. You have only to excite the sleeping serpent in every bosom; only to awaken and arouse the passions there slumbering; only to present the proper infernal motives; to stimulate by the proper excitements; to withdraw restraints, and it will strike at the heart of God himself. We may start in horror, shocked at such a suggestion, and like the young courtier of Damascus exclaim, in affected or real innocence of evil intent, "What! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing!" but, like Hazael, the assassin, we may discover, when too late, the strength of the evil and the weakness of the good within us. We are startled at the enormity of these crimes against human government, and it is well that we are; portentious would the sign be if we were not; but this is only a repetition of what is daily attempted against the divine government. Rebellion against God is an attempt to destroy the government of God; and sin against God strikes a blow at his existence.

This huge crime is but the development of that evil spirit which lies in all our hearts. Unrestrained

by education and by the providence and the grace of God, we are all assassins. Let us not cease then to thank God for his protection in the past, and to pray for restraining grace in the future. "*But for the grace of God,*" exclaimed John Bunyan, as he saw a degraded wretch lying in the street, "*But for the grace of God, there lies John Bunyan,* and so may we say, "*But for the grace of God, I am that assassin; I am that fugitive from justice, accursed of God, and loathed and feared by men!*" Let us then incessantly praise and pray for that restraining grace.

And have you not observed, my friends, how God in his providence is here presenting *a test of character* to this whole nation? "As a man thinketh *in his heart,* SO IS HE. He who approves this deed, who "in his heart" rejoices in it, or palliates or excuses it; he who does not find his whole moral nature abhor and revolt at it, is himself, shall I add *herself,* an assassin. He or she only needs the opportunity, the withdrawal of restraints by God, the proper stimulation and hardihood, to strike again to the heart of our present President. If you hear a man palliate or excuse that deed, never trust yourself alone or in a dark night with him. Neither your reputation, nor your character, nor your life would be safe with him. He that approves or excuses a crime committed, is himself, in the sight of God, guilty of that crime, and at the bar of God must answer for it. Here then, we say, God is applying a test of character to every man and woman in this nation, and to his unerring eye there is revealed by this test, who is a murderer, who is an assassin and who is not. "*Be ye not partakers of other men's sins.*"

Finally, let us thank God that though this blow

was aimed at the life of this nation, *the nation still lives*, and it is all the more vividly and intensely alive, because of this its sore bereavement. No dagger's point can reach its life. You may take its chosen head away, but still IT LIVES, and will live, though an hundred Presidents die.

"In all the centuries we can find but two or three equal calamities. Assassinations indeed there have been of sovereigns, ministers, but in not more than two or three instances has a ruler been taken whose person seemed so vital to the State; yet never did the loss prove fatal to the country. CÆSAR was stabbed in the senate house—yet Rome lived even after the mighty JULIUS fell. HENRY IV, the greatest of the Kings of France, was stabbed in the streets of Paris, by a hired assassin. But though he died, his country was still great and powerful. But a heavier calamity it was which struck down WILLIAM, Prince of Orange, nearly 300 years ago, for the little State of Holland seemed to rest on his single arm, and when he fell, it seemed as if he carried down the hopes of his country into the same grave. But God was a wall of fire round about them. So when the great GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS fell, not by an assassin, but, in battle, it seemed as if it were a blow fatal to the cause of Protestanism in Europe. But the same being who nerved the arm of GUSTAVUS, raised up other defenders. Thus men die, but nations live. And so we cannot doubt it will prove here. The God of our father who has led us through all the dark periods of our history, will still be our protector and guide."—*N. Y. Evangelist.*

And let us, in this day of our national humiliation and sorrow, by the contemplation of the enormity

and horror of this crime, *learn to hate and loathe and pray constantly for deliverance* from all crime and all wrong. Let us cultivate a deeper and broader and more sacred respect for all lawful authority. Let us instill into the minds of the young a spirit of reverence for and obedience to all lawful authority and government. Let us teach them the sin against God, which lies in resistance to that government; the crime before God and man of them that would destroy that government; and the unspeakable enormity and guilt of this crime which has struck the world aghast with horror, and smitten the national heart with an incurable grief. Let us teach them the most sacred duty of *praying for their rulers*, though even their spiritual guides set them not the example; and that they that refuse thus to do, not only disobey God, but condemn themselves of the unutterable meanness of consenting to receive and to enjoy the protection of a government, which they hate and would destroy. And let us see in this great and appalling overflow of crime the *permissive providence of God*, who for wise reasons, now as always, has permitted so great an iniquity, not because he could not have prevented it, but because he intends out of so great evil to bring forth good to this nation, and glory to himself.

Let us remember that, "*He will make the wrath of man to praise him,*" *and the remainder thereof he will restrain.*—AMEN.

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